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AUTHOR Aiex, Nola Kortner
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ABSTRACT

Intended to help prepare individuals for job seeking, this digest suggests some resources to consult to help improve basic communication skills needed for the interview process. The digest reviews research on teaching interview skills in the classroom, discussing role playing, videotapes, and techniques workshops. The digest also lists practical tips for the interviewee. (RS)

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Indiana University
2805 E. 10th St., Suite 150

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Bloomington, IN 47408-2698
(812) 855-5847

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Communication Strategies for Employment Interviews

by Nola Kortner Aiex

In a period of widespread unemployment and increased competition for jobs, the job interview becomes more and more important for securing a position, whether we are talking about the very first job for a recent high school graduate, an entry-level position for an individual who has spent a substantial period of preparation and education for a professional career, or a more advanced position for a person who has already spent considerable time in the workforce.

According to Baker and Spier (1990), "Much criticism is leveled at the nature and usefulness of the employment interview, but despite its shortcomings and the availability of more objective means of selection, classification, and placement, the personal interview is used pervasively." Searching for a job (and interviewing) can fill the prospective employee with tension under the best of circumstances, but some basic preparation in the fundamentals of employment interviewing can boost a person's self confidence and make the entire interview process more pleasant and relaxed.

This digest will aid in preparing individuals for job seeking by suggesting some resources to consult to help improve basic communication skills needed for the interview process.

Everyday Communication Skills

Ascher (1988) discusses what employers look for from high school graduates in beginning jobs and concludes that work-related social skills are as important to employers as are basic academic skills. This leads us to the conclusion that effective communication skills are needed in most jobs on an everyday basis.

Indeed, Rynes and Gerhart (1990) found that especially where firm-specific assessments were concerned, interviewers evaluated applicants according to their *interpersonal skills*, goal orientation, and physical attractiveness.

Basic Tips

Stewart (1991) defines an interview as a conversation that is limited by a predetermined and serious purpose, and he adds that this limitation suggests advance planning and some purpose other than mere enjoyment or passing the time of day. He says: "Both the interviewer and the interviewee need to listen attentively to each other, so that ideas, feelings, and information are not lost."

Clemons (1983) focuses on effective use of nonverbal communication skills to indicate interest in the interview. Clemons also touches upon the necessity of leaving a favorable impression, both by knowing how to bring an interview to a conclusion and, if appropriate, by following the session with a letter restating interest.

Roderick (1985) stresses the importance of first impressions, such as being on time, being prepared, dressing correctly, shaking hands or greeting the interviewer correctly, and maintaining eye contact. She also advocates discussing salary.

Negative behavior factors are reviewed by Vaughn and Darsey (1987), who cite lack of confidence, failure to ask questions, nervous mannerisms, excessive talkativeness, and failure to elaborate on answers as the most common behaviors to which interviewers react unfavorably.

How to Prepare for Interviews

An article by Hugenberg and Hvizdos (1984) details specific methods by which teachers or counselors can prepare students for interviews. A wide selection of citations on training students for the interviewing process can be found in Shermis (1989).

Both Thompson and Williams (1987) and Karanian (1986) discuss the use of videotapes to guide students toward communication in the interview process. Thompson and Williams describe a mock interview for journalism students (but adaptable for any profession), while Karanian focuses on role-playing exercises and includes several scenarios for role playing which can be used in a course on interpersonal communication.

Markham (1989) has designed a course for individuals, both interviewers and interviewees, who desire the skills and techniques necessary to serve effectively in their respective roles (Markham's definition of "interviewing" is, as follows: "a dynamic, complicated process between two complex parties operating with imperfect verbal and non-verbal symbols and often guided or controlled by the situation.") The course was

Nola Kortner Aiex is an Assistant Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills.

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prepared especially for students wishing to gain an understanding of the interviewing process in all its facets; the prerequisites to employment interviewing; integrated skills within the appropriate context of an interview; and information useful in directing and participating in various types of interviews.

Goals, objectives, and readings are listed for units on: (1) the interviewing process; (2) structuring the interview; (3) informational interviewing (both the survey and journalistic types); (4) employment interviewing; (5) performance interviewing; (6) counseling interviewing; and (7) persuasive interviewing. Although the course was originally intended to be used as a college-level course, it could be adapted for almost any level by the instructor.

The Life Skills/Job Seeking Techniques Workshop (1987), an adult education project of Amarillo College in Texas, teaches diverse daily living skills, including job resume writing and interviewing behavior. The most useful tips are collected in a section entitled, "How to Conduct Yourself in an Interview," which outlines the following basic steps for successful interviewing: (1) dress properly; (2) be on time; (3) be friendly; (4) show your enthusiasm; (5) maintain eye contact; (6) be aware of body language; (7) be yourself; (8) express yourself; (9) be a good listener; (10) ask questions; (11) emphasize your strengths; (12) don't criticize (former employers or co-workers); (13) have something to offer; (14) be assertive; (15) avoid personal issues; (16) thank the interviewer; (17) plan follow-up action; and (18) send a thank-you letter. A sample follow-up letter is also provided at the end of the section.

Advice from an Expert

Stewart (1991) believes that "applicants need to begin the position-seeking process with a thorough self-analysis, for they cannot determine whether either general or specific positions are best for them, or answer questions insightfully, if they do not know themselves." He also advises: "Never turn down the chance to interview for a job. Job applicants learn something new about themselves during every job interview."

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